

VZCZCXRO7458  
OO RUEHROV  
DE RUEHJM #0574 0871028  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 281028Z MAR 07  
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7080  
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

UNCLAS JERUSALEM 000574

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR  
WILLIAMS/SHAMPAINE/STEINGER; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS;  
TREASURY FOR SZUBIN/LOEFFLER/NUGENT/HIRSON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV PHUM E AID KBIO KWBG IS](#)

SUBJECT: WAVE OF SEWAGE SUDDENLY ENGULFS GAZA VILLAGE

REF: JERUSALEM 509

1. (SBU) An earth embankment around a recently-built sewage pond near Beit Lahiya collapsed at 9:30 a.m. on March 27, spilling a large volume of sewage and sand onto the nearby Bedouin village of Um Nasser. The sewage pond was built by the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) in October 2006 in order to store effluent from the filled-to-capacity Beit Lahiya sewage lake.

2. (SBU) OCHA Gaza field staff confirmed that there have been at least four deaths and numerous wounded. According to USAID Gaza-based staff reports from the scene, 238 structures were partially damaged and 130 were totally damaged from the flooding of over 70,000 cubic meters of effluent. According to USAID mission reports, UNRWA has said it has sufficient stocks of supplies to respond immediately to the 260-300 families affected by the flooding. USAID's emergency response implementer the Rafeed project, will assist with cooking gas, gas stoves, gas lights, and clothes sufficient for 250 families. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) is working to coordinate volunteer clean-up efforts.

3. (SBU) Deputy World Bank Country Director Faris Hadad-Zervos told Econoff that, according to his PWA sources, the collapse was caused by human error, as the pond was constructed haphazardly and quickly. He also speculated that too much effluent may have been pumped from the Beit Lahiya sewage lake into the sewage pond, filling the pond beyond its threshold and causing the sudden collapse of an embankment. (Comment: While the definitive cause of the rupture has yet to be determined, human error, either in the operation or in the original construction, is likely to blame. End comment.)

4. (SBU) Background: Hadad-Zervos confirmed that the PWA had used World Bank-funded pipes and equipment in October 2006 to build the temporary sewage pond that collapsed. The World Bank approved the interim measure since the construction of a large-scale, World Bank-funded wastewater treatment plant had been placed on hold by the GOI for security reasons (see reftel) and there were widespread concerns that the Beit Lahiya sewage lake would overflow. (Comment: Instead of the larger lake overflowing, it was the smaller and newer sewage pond that breached its embankment. End comment.)

WALLES